



## Biography of Yun Wang

Poet and cosmologist Yun Wang grew up in rural southwest China. She began writing poetry when she was 12, and majored in Physics at Tsinghua University when she was 16. She came to the U.S. for graduate school in Physics in 1985. She is the author of two poetry books (*The Book of Totality*, Salmon Poetry Press, 2015; and *The Book of Jade*, Winner of the 15th Nicholas Roerich Poetry Prize, Story Line Press, 2002), two poetry chapbooks (*Horse by the Mountain Stream*, Word Palace Press, 2016; *The Carp*, Bull Thistle Press, 1994), and a book of poetry translations (*Dreaming of Fallen Blossoms: Tune Poems of Su Dong-Po*, White Pine Press, 2018). Wang's poems have been published in numerous literary journals, including *The Kenyon Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Salamander Magazine*, *Green Mountains Review*, and *International Quarterly*. Her translations of classical Chinese poetry have been published in *Poetry Canada Review*, *Willow Springs*, *Connotation Press*, and elsewhere. Wang is a Senior Research Scientist at California Institute of Technology. She is the author of the cosmology graduate textbook, *Dark Energy* (Wiley/VCH, 2010).

### Reviews of "The Book of Totality" (Salmon Poetry Press, 2015):

"Yun Wang's poems span ages and cultures to form a unifying vision. With striking, precise images and a strong narrative sense, she presents a cosmos, one for which we should all be grateful." -- **Sam Hamill (Founding Editor of Copper Canyon Press)**

"Physicist-poet Yun Wang's superb second collection gives us both intricacy and the cosmos writ large. Wrenching stories of her family's oppression during the Cultural Revolution are woven together with invocations to the poets Li Bai and Su Dong Po, to Star Trek and to Mahler. Along the way, we travel with the poet through the galaxy, confront the time-space continuum, and spend time with a cat who may be a cousin to Schrödinger's. "We curve in the curved space," the poet tells us, and indeed *The Book of Totality* offers us a universe vivid and liquid, through tales both wrenching and joyous." -- **Janet McAdams (Winner of the American Book Award)**

"Yun Wang combines her physics knowledge with poetry to create this collection full of gorgeous descriptions and deep understanding of the universe. The poems blend her family's cultural history, particularly that of China, with imagery of stars, space, and galaxies to form a timeless lyricism that plumbs the depths of the human psyche." -- **World Literature Today**

### Reviews of "The Book of Jade" (Winner of the 15<sup>th</sup> Nicholas Roerich Poetry Prize, Story Line Press, 2002):

"This is an unforgettable book. Wang employs a strange and strangely disturbing, invented form, something between a psalm and a prose poem. In clipped paragraphs, she conducts us through narratives that start as stories and end in dreamlike images. This device could, in less assured hands, become dull with repetition. Instead, the poet sharpens the details in each piece to almost unbearable points. Although the autobiographical and historical facts that underpin the book are themselves striking and often tragic--Wang, born in China, saw and heard of numbing human cruelties--the overall effect is to exalt the human capacity to survive, and even to love, despite circumstances. Winner of the Nicholas Roerich poetry prize, this book and this poet deserve great attention."

-- **Patricia Monaghan in Booklist** (Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved)

"Yun Wang has written a wonderful, rich and exotic book that is in itself a cosmology of the human condition."

-- **Ai (Winner of the National Book Award)**

"This is an extraordinary book, a book of breathtaking delicacy, phantasmagoric inventiveness, exquisite beauty and fragrance, physics and astrophysics, moments of eroticism, cats, fish, infants, and the tragic horrors of deliberate famine, greed, and ignorant brutality during the Cultural Revolution - all in verses as tender as petals. Yun Wang is a rising star in American poetry."

-- **Alicia Ostriker (Winner of the Jewish National Book Award)**

"Yun Wang employs the heart of a poet and the mind of a scientist to plot the hidden meanings in experiences both personal and universal, horrifying and beautiful."

-- **Oklahoma Center for the Book**

## The Carp

My father was the school principal. The day I was born, he caught a twenty pound carp. He gave it to the school kitchen. All the teachers and boarding students tasted it.

Waves of mountains surrounded us. I grew up yearning for the ocean. Smoke arose from green mountains to form clouds each morning. My father named me Cloud.

When a son was born to Confucius, the king of Lu sent over a carp as present. Confucius named his son Carp.

The wise say a carp leaping over the dragon gate is a very lucky sign. My father says he named me Cloud because I was born in the year of the dragon: there are always clouds following a dragon. Confucius' son died an early death. My father has only three daughters.

When I was three, I wandered all over the campus. A stray cat in a haunted town. My mother says I passed the room where my father was imprisoned. He whispered to me, hid a message in my little pocket. It was his will that I should grow up a strong woman, and find justice for him.

They caught me. My father was beaten to near death. Some of them were students, whose parents were peasants. Some of them were teachers, who used to be his best friends. They had tasted the carp.

It has been recorded that Confucius could not tell the difference between millet and wheat, and was thus mocked by a peasant. This peasant became a big hero, representing the wisdom of the people, thousands of years after Confucius' death.

My father still goes fishing, the only thing that seems to calm him. The mountains are sleeping waves. My father catches very small fish. My mother eats them. My friends laugh at me, when I tell them that once upon a time, my father caught a carp weighing twenty pounds.

(From *The Book of Jade* by Yun Wang)

## **The Parable of Love**

A man traps a bird.  
He complains of her sad, listless notes.  
She wraps herself in her blue wings.

She appears dead.  
He buries her in a glossy white box.

He drives a car at night  
with the lights off.  
He climbs into the white box  
to ask her one more question.

(From *The Book of Jade* by Yun Wang)

## Susan's Cat

When light is withdrawn from the sky  
it is shut within the cat's eyes

His black fur shapes the air  
His pupils grow into round lamps

The cat hears

A rustle of faded silk  
A body ten thousand miles away  
across the ocean and beneath mountains  
in a shroud woven of gold medallions

In the cradle the baby sleeps  
Her breath a fresh sweetness

The cat ponders in the dark  
It has licked the baby's head all over  
brushed the hair on her forehead  
into seven black columns

(From *The Book of Jade* by Yun Wang)

## Conception

The unnamed flowers close dead tight. Rain erases a collage of footprints.  
They wait for ten or twenty years to shed their seeds.

Within a lead sarcophagus, men in Mylar suits search for the missing  
nuclear fuel that could feed a second chain reaction.

And the aliens, said to be small and with egg-size dark eyes, could be conducting  
biological experiments.

The fire comes. The flowers open again, glow slowly into ashes.  
Seeds remain. There will be little parachutes.

(From *The Book of Totality* by Yun Wang)

## **Futurescape**

Thunder of applause  
followed by rain on the desert.  
A single yellow flower  
opens from a cactus palm.

A child sleeps.  
Oars navigate an opal sea.

The Sun will die in five billion years.  
Ten million spaceships will depart  
from its white dwarf corpse.

A kiss sparks  
beneath a canopy of cherry blossoms.  
Electricity of one thousand faces  
carved in breathing stone  
rushes from Notre Dame.

Protons will decay.  
The Universe will dissipate  
back into a sea  
of space-time foam.

Child, you are the guide  
in my journey. I climb on  
the boat of your laughter.

(From *The Book of Totality* by Yun Wang)

## Dark Energy

Mayan nobles sometimes marched their children  
on winding paths up snow mountains.  
They would dig a square room, light a fire  
leave the children with jugs of elixir  
prepared by the priests.

The children sang softly, drank, slept  
never woke.  
The gods did not come.

The universe is mostly empty.  
Space expands. Galaxies drift away  
from each other at accelerated speeds.

Perhaps only the priests  
led the children on their last journey.  
If the gods had been watching, they would have  
knocked the cups from the little hands  
carried the children into their beryllium chariot  
beamed the priests into the ice-hidden tomb ---  
at least for a few hours.

Child, look for others  
in the Milky Way's outskirts.  
Someday you will return my ashes  
to the stars. You will ponder  
pathways to other universes.

(From *The Book of Totality* by Yun Wang)

## Face on Mars

The path was there before anyone  
human trod it

A random formation in nature

On the lofty cross the white-gowned angel  
lifted her heels

At your finger's touch  
the wreath of daisies  
turns to ashes  
shadow of a candlestick

Your eyes wake from darkness

You were told it was all in you  
deep at the bottom  
nothing but revelation

How many times have you died  
and lived to see  
the angel shedding whiteness  
the tomb of millennia open

(From *Horse by the Mountain Stream* by Yun Wang)